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SUBJECT: ZAMBIA: CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR ZIMBABWEAN REFUGEES

REF: STATE 43901

Classified By: Ambassador Carmen Martinez for Reason(s) 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Zambian Minister of Home Affairs Shikapwasha and the UNHCR Representative in Zambia told DCM on May 5 that contingency plans and preparations were well underway to receive up to 25 thousand Zimbabwean refugees in southern Zambia. The GRZ has identified a site in Siavonga (on Lake Kariba, which forms the Zambian/Zimbabwe border) with potable water and electricity access. Home Affairs Ministry Commissioner for Refugees Jacob Mphepo and UNHCR Representative James Lynch said that tents, medical supplies and food were warehoused near the site. The camp could be up and running "within 24 hours," according to Lynch.

¶2. (SBU) Mphepo and Lynch noted that as of early May only three Zimbabweans had requested asylum in Zambia. Zimbabwean day traders, truckers, and other informal travelers continue to cross the Zambia/Zimbabwe border daily without incident (see para 3). Shikapwasha, Mphepo and other Zambian officials say a large Zimbabwean population -- comprised mainly of large extended families -- has already emigrated and settled "legally" in Zambia. These Zimbabwean passport holders -- largely farmers -- have valid residency and work permits.

¶3. (C/NF) Member USDAO Lusaka traveled to the Chirundu and Siavonga/Kariba border crossing points during 2-4 May 2008. Conversations with Zambian government officials at the Chirundu border post revealed that there has been no increase in the number of Zimbabwean citizens crossing the border into Zambia. Despite the situation in their country, Zimbabweans still continue to come into Zambia to buy and sell goods, but return to Zimbabwe at the close of the day. Zambians and Zimbabweans are allowed to transit the border on day passes, vice passports. At the Siavonga/Kariba crossing, member again confirmed with Zambian government officials that there has been no observed increase in the number of personnel crossing from Zimbabwe to Zambia.

MARTINEZ